

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes March 18, 2021**

1. Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Aging, Amy Lulich
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Rachel Torbert
Illinois Department of Public Health, Don Jones
Illinois Community College Board, Lavon Nelson
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Sandy Wittig
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis
Southern Illinois University, Laura Kessel
Rural Partners, Molly Hammond

Not Present:

Illinois Department of Agriculture, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Housing Development Authority, Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Transportation, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Finance Authority

Citizen Members Present:

Heather Hampton-Knodle
Sameer Vohra
Sonja Reece
Norm Walzer

Guests:

Karen Jenkins
Mary Reynolds

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor
Charles Watkins, Chief of Staff for the Office of the Lt. Governor
Akanksha Balekai, Dunn Fellow for the Office of the Lt. Governor
Bobby Mannis, Policy Director for the Office of the Lt. Governor

Quorum determined. *All individuals were present via phone or videoconferencing.

Lt. Governor Stratton inquired if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda for today's meeting. Heather Hampton-Knodle made a motion to accept the agenda. Sonja Reece seconded the motion. Motion passed.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 10, 2020.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that a draft of the minutes from the December 2020 meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting.

Sonja Reece made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Sonja Reece. The motion was seconded by Don Jones. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

4. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

The Lt. Governor reminded everyone that to serve on this Council, you must comply with the statutory mandates requiring the completion of the annual ethics and harassment-discrimination-prevention trainings. The training packets were attached to the calendar invite for today's meeting. Please review the documents, sign, and forward back to Akanksha for record keeping. If you have any questions regarding this training, please let her office know.

The Lt. Governor also reminded everyone to please keep their phones muted when unless you are presenting or speaking. When you do speak, please state your name first for the minutes.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that Dr. Kyle Harfst, the Associate Vice President of Economic Development and Innovation for the University of Illinois System will be presenting today. She explained that the I.I.N. is a group of public universities and community colleges that work together to improve the state's economy through innovation, research, and education, many of which have a rural focus. The I.I.N. has 15 hubs throughout the state (12 universities and 3 non-university hubs). This organization reaches across the rural-urban divide to develop a broad agenda meant to bolster the entirety of our state. She announced that the I.I.N. has awarded \$229,000 in seed grants to eight research teams.

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for their time, energy, and efforts for working on the GRAC.

New Business

The Lt. Governor introduced Dr. Kyle Harfst, Executive Director, Illinois Innovation Network (I.I.N.), who also serves as Associate VP for Economic Development and Innovation with the University of Illinois System.

Dr. Harfst provided a brief overview of I.I.N. and explained the focus of each hub. He noted that each hub will have its own advisory board and committees to further their mission.

The Lt. Governor thanked Dr. Harfst for his presentation. She noted that she is excited about all of the work that I.I.N. is doing. She then asked if there were any questions.

Sameer Vohra offered to help collaborate and partner with the I.I.N.

Heather Hampton-Knodle inquired into the efforts that are being made to engage local economic developers or civic leaders to make these projects for meaningful in rural areas. Dr. Harfst explained that individuals can be involved in the advisory boards that are currently being formed. He also explained that anyone can attend their meetings.

Anne Silvis asked, “What will be the metrics for the measurement of success?”

Dr. Harfst explained that the metrics will be different for each hub, but could include: how many startups, how many health centers, or new businesses, are formed as a result of the network and the specific innovation hubs. The I.I.N. will strive to be part of the solution to solve the issues facing rural areas.

Lt. Governor Stratton stated she is particularly interested in bridging the rural-urban divide. She wants citizens to make the connection that there is a problem in rural; it most likely is a problem in urban settings, too. She is advocating for rural and urban to come together to solve challenges that affect all communities. She stated that communities need to be educated to understand that the gap between rural and urban can be bridged. Her office is willing to help I.I.N. in any way that they can.

Lt. Governor once again thanked members of the GRAC for being engaged. She encourages all to attend the meetings of I.I.N. Once she receives a list of the meeting times from Dr. Harfst, she will have her staff forward to all GRAC members. She also requested that Dr. Harfst send a list of which community colleges are involved.

Committee Updates

Lt. Governor Stratton asked that updates be provided on efforts to develop telehealth, rural education, and economic infrastructures throughout the state.

Healthcare

Laura Kessel, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine.

Laura provided an update that her committee is looking to identify two locations – one central and one southern – in Illinois to demonstrate Telehealth Services and to allow appointments for those that do not have broadband access.

Laura mentioned that currently there are two items being addressed in legislation regarding Telehealth.

The Lt. Governor thanked Laura for her report. She announced that she will be sending out information on how to file support for bills in legislation.

Education and Workforce Development

The Lt. Governor requested that Bobby Mannis provide an update on education and workforce. Bobby said future webinars are being discussed.

The Lt. Governor thanked Bobby for the updates.

Economic Development & Infrastructure

The Lt. Governor stated that Norman Walzer would be providing an update.

Norm announced that the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs / GRAC / Rural Partners conference went well. There were 343 registered attendees.

He explained that limited data indicates that small businesses are doing better than expected. He also mentioned that the federal approach is being discussed regarding what opportunities are available.

He noted that webinars are currently being held and more will follow. He recently spoke to Mike Dunn, who spoke at the IIRA Conference, about the possibility of holding a webinar.

Norm announced that Heather Hampton-Knodle and he were working on a rural business succession/transition guidebook.

The Lt. Governor thanked Norm for his comments. She noted that the “silver lining” from the pandemic is that people are using technology to reach more people. She stated that recovery planning on how to make sure that people continue to shop locally to sustain small business is necessary. She explained that additional education is necessary so that citizens understand that rural does not only mean agriculture.

5. Member Updates and Reports

Laura Kessel stated that a webinar series is being hosted each month with an overall topic. Depending on the topic, there are 2-4 sessions each month. Please let Anne Silvis or herself know if you’d like the info on the webinars. The Lt. Governor requested that Laura forward this information to her office.

Heather Hampton-Knodle noted that the IL Ag Women hosted a virtual event. More information can be found about his organization at <https://womenchangingthefaceofagriculture.com>.

She noted that she has been participating in a Federal Communication committee. She will share the report with the GRAC.

Sameer Vohra, SIU School of Medicine, has been asked to serve on the IL Children’s Mental Health Partnership.

Amy Lulich shared that there will be an AARP IL 2021 Disparities Summit on April 26-27. She also mentioned a Health, Mind, and Community Conference on March 30. Please contact Amy for more information.

The Lt. Governor thanked everyone for their updates. She reminded everyone that if you have an upcoming event, please let her office know and they will do their best to share it on their platform.

The Lt. Governor asked if there were any public comments. There were no public comments at this time.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced the next meeting will be June 17.

Sonja Reece made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 11:21.

Respectfully Submitted:

Sandy Wittig and Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University